



Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown
Eastern District of California

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CHICO MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO SCHEME TO SMUGGLE PROTECTED TORTOISES INTO THE UNITED STATES

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown announced today that GARRETT SMITH, 40, of Chico, Calif., pleaded guilty to engaging in an international conspiracy to smuggle protected tortoises into the United States and to money laundering.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

According to Assistant United States Attorney S. Robert Tice-Raskin, who is prosecuting the case, SMITH, working in concert with an unknown conspirator known as Turtle Man who is believed to reside in Singapore, engaged in a conspiracy to obtain wild tortoises protected under international and United States law and smuggle the same into the United States for sale. Turtle Man, and others acting at his direction, obtained wild tortoises in Asia, specifically Burmese Star Tortoises and Indian Star Tortoises, that were protected under an international treaty known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and sold such species to SMITH in the Eastern District of California ordinarily by means of e-mail transactions. Both defendants unlawfully imported these tortoises into the United States without required licenses or documentation and caused international wire transfers of money to be made from the United States to Turtle Man, as payment for the tortoises and to facilitate the carrying on of the wildlife smuggling. SMITH then sold the tortoises to distributors and customers throughout the United States. In total, they imported 30 Indian Star Tortoises and five Burmese Star Tortoises.

Sentencing is set for April 21, 2009, at 9:15 a.m. before Senior U.S. Judge Lawrence K. Karlton. The maximum statutory penalty for the count of conviction is five years and a fine of \$250,000. However, the actual sentence will be dictated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of factors, and will be imposed at the discretion of the court.

The unknown conspirator Turtle Man remains at large.

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